

The Tax Code was intended to raise revenue for the Federal Government. It should not be used to influence behavior or personal choice. This excessive tax on beer is not efficient at raising revenue, and the cost of each dollar imposed is much greater in terms of jobs lost and economic drag.

There are, of course, concerns about the social costs of alcohol consumption. I am very sensitive to those concerns and am encouraged by the reductions in drunk driving and alcohol abuse. But the fact is, this tax punishes all beer consumers instead of the minority who act dangerously. In any case, these problems must be addressed directly through specific legislation rather than indirectly through the Tax Code, which is already complicated enough.

Mr. President, because this tax has grown so much since 1991 and because it not only affects beer wholesalers and resellers but hard-working Montanans who enjoy these products responsibly, I am pleased to cosponsor this legislation in the Senate.

#### PASSING THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, every day we see more evidence that this economy is not working for millions of Americans. One troubling trend is the growing divide between rich and poor the widening gap in income inequality and the distribution of wealth in our country.

Over the past 24 years, the most fortunate Americans, in the top 1 percent, saw their incomes more than double from an average of \$306,000 to over \$700,000. During that same period, the incomes of average Americans grew just 15 percent.

But the poorest fifth of our citizens saw their already inadequate incomes grow just \$600—over 24 years.

As a result, the top 1 percent of Americans now get over 12 percent of all the income, up over 50 percent 24 years ago. And the share of the average family actually dropped. The share going to the bottom fifth dropped even more.

We are moving apart, not coming together, as a nation. Last year, the Chair of the Federal Reserve called growing concentration of income in the hands of a tiny minority “a really serious problem.”

There are many things we need to do to get our economy working for working families. One place to start is at the bottom among those Americans who work at full-time jobs and remain below the poverty line. We should not permit that to happen. If we honor work, we have to reward it. We should not stand for any American to work a full-time job and come home too poor to meet the basic needs.

The minimum wage has not increased since 1996—and all of that increase has been wiped out by the cost of living. The minimum wage today, at \$5.15 an hour, is even worth less in today's dollars than the \$4.25 rate it replaced.

Today, the minimum wage is worth only a third of the average hourly wage of American workers, the lowest level in more than half a century. The bottom rung of the ladder of opportunity is broken. It is time to fix it.

That is why I am a cosponsor of S. 1062, which will raise the minimum wage in three stages, over the next 3 years, to \$7.25 an hour.

That means a pay raise for over 7 million workers and lifting the floor under everybody's wages.

It has been 10 years since we last raised the minimum wage. Over the past few years, we have passed tax cuts that last year alone gave over \$100,000 to the wealthiest among us. The gap between rich and poor is now as big as it was during the Great Depression.

Raising the minimum wage is only the first step in restoring balance and fairness to our economy. But it is past time for us to take that step. We must not wait any longer.

#### BE KIND TO ANIMALS WEEK

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I am pleased to announce that this week, May 7 to 13, 2006, has been designated by the American Humane Association as the 92nd Be Kind to Animals Week. The American Humane Association, which is headquartered in Englewood, CO, was founded in 1877 and is the oldest national organization dedicated to the mission of preventing cruelty to animals, as well as to children. Through this work, American Humane has helped America shed light on the nature and origins of cruelty and through this annual observance reminds us that the practice of kindness can both heal hurt and yield constructive reform.

When, in 1915, American Humane launched the Nation's first national week for animals, its purpose was simple: “to direct the attention of the public to the importance of giving proper care and attention to animals.” This message resonated powerfully with Americans and quickly evolved into a national public education campaign with a broader mission: promoting the teaching of humane education in our schools; promoting the good works of animal shelters; and helping Americans understand the unique bond between humans and animals.

Be Kind to Animals Week is the oldest event of its kind. Each year it reminds us how animals enrich our lives through their companionship, friendship and love. Over the last 91 years, a central theme of this annual event has been the importance of teaching the principles of kindness and compassion to children. Humane groups spend much of their time reacting to mistreatment of animals as it occurs. American Humane believes that, if we share our humane values with our children, these problems can be prevented and our society made safer and kinder.

American Humane's Be Kind to Animals Week is as much a lifelong atti-

tude as it is a weeklong event. It is about animal shelters, veterinarians, humane educators, animal control professionals, and the faith community promoting discussion and reflection about kindness to animals, to individuals, within families and perhaps most important, within communities. But Be Kind to Animals Week isn't just about animals. It is also about children and those who care for and about them.

As a veterinarian, I have seen firsthand how important animals are to people. When a family adopts a pet, it becomes one of them. Usually, when people bring an animal to a veterinarian, it is because there is something wrong with the animal. It was always obvious to me the love that people had for their animals. The illness of a pet can cause great sorrow, but the healing of a pet brings great joy. Many studies have shown the increased happiness and healing powers of spending time with a pet.

During Be Kind to Animals Week, we should all keep in mind a simple but powerful message. The week should serve as a reminder that as humans, we need to be ever more compassionate about the animals in our world, whether they are companion pets, service animals such as seeing-eye dogs, zoo critters, livestock, or nature's wildlife. It is a reminder that the bond between humans and animals is a vital one and is capable of bringing joy and healing to people of all ages. It is also a reminder to be more kind and compassionate to our fellow man. We co-exist in this world—human to human and human to animal—and those bonds must be maintained, they must be kept strong.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### HONORING SIGNATURE SCHOOL

• Mr. BAYH. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Evanville's Signature School, which was recently ranked by Newsweek Magazine as one of the top one hundred high schools in the Nation. This ranking is a remarkable honor to the school, and it demonstrates the hard work and dedication to educational excellence of the students and teachers at Signature.

I am honored to have the opportunity to commend the achievements of Signature's students and the commitment of Signature's families and teachers, which made this prestigious recognition possible. Now more than ever, education is the key to greater personal opportunity. Here in Washington, I have fought to ensure that education is available and accessible to all our Nation's students. However, the real, heroic work is done on the ground, in our schools. The Signature School is a perfect example of what can happen when teachers and students unite around the goal of achieving academic excellence.

Signature was the first charter school in Indiana, created to offer a